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on Tuesday, 2 July 1996, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. HENZE (Germany)
(Vice-President)

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In the absence of Mr. Gervais (Côte d'Ivoire), Mr. Henze (Germany), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (continued)

Requests from non-governmental organizations for hearings

The PRESIDENT said that he took it that the Council agreed to hear the organizations listed in document E/1996/78 under the agenda items indicated.

It was so decided.

Open-ended Working Group on the Review of Arrangements for Consultations with Non-Governmental Organizations

The PRESIDENT said that he took it that the Council wished to accept the Bureau's recommendation that consultations on the review of arrangements for consultations with non-governmental organizations should continue.

It was so decided.

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEMES: (continued) (E/1996/4 and Corr.1, E/1996/18 and Add.1)

(a) COORDINATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM ACTIVITIES FOR POVERTY ERADICATION (continued) (E/1996/61)

Ms. AWORI (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that UNDP was pursuing a broad, multisectoral development agenda aimed at poverty eradication, with employment and sustainable livelihoods, gender equality, environmental sustainability and improved governance as major goals and programming areas. A strong country presence placed an important responsibility on UNDP to support national capacities and promote a frank and open dialogue on development issues with national Governments and all country partners and other agencies in the United Nations system.

Most UNDP country programmes had been reoriented towards poverty eradication. That emphasis was likely to increase further during the next programming cycle as a result of changes in programming arrangements. In Africa, UNDP was working on a five-year programme of employment generation for poverty reduction in conjunction with the International Labour Organization

(ILO). In Asia, UNDP was helping the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to implement a social mobilization strategy aimed at strengthening village organizations and training community leaders in methodologies for income generation and infrastructure development projects.

During the current year, the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, UNDP had launched its Poverty Strategies Initiative to support country efforts to implement the Copenhagen agreements, especially with regard to the formulation of national poverty eradication strategies and action plans.

UNDP believed that, if fully implemented, the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report concerning the improvement of coordinated United Nations support at the country level would enable the United Nations system to make a breakthrough in the increasing problem of the feminization of poverty.

National policy, while critical, was not sufficient to ensure poverty reduction and greater equity in developing countries. The increasing disparities and instability of the international economic system offered bleak development prospects to the least developed countries, making it very difficult for them to marshal the necessary resources for poverty reduction. New ways must be found of harnessing the immense potential of new technologies in an increasingly globalized world in such a way as to ensure that they would contribute to social cohesion, integration and greater prosperity for all.

A related concern was finding ways for countries to move beyond structural adjustment towards policies that promoted growth and reduced poverty. External debt continued to impose a heavy drain on government resources which would otherwise be channelled into human development priorities. Current policy prescriptions needed to be reviewed in order to ensure that strong foundations for economic growth were established and that concern for the poor ranked at the top of the policy agenda.

While sustained poverty reduction could not be accomplished without a permanent boosting of people's earning capacity, it would be unwise to rely on market forces alone for the creation of jobs. Innovative strategies must be devised to support poor people in their quest for a sustainable livelihood.

The international community must work together to strengthen institutional capacity in developing countries for the design and implementation of more equitable poverty-reduction policies and programmes. There was a compelling need to reconsider economic reform programmes.

Since national policies would not suffice, the intergovernmental machinery of the United Nations must elaborate a new global framework that would support greater access by the poorer countries to the potential benefits of economic globalization. To that end better coordination of policies and programmes among all development organizations was required, in addition to new financial resources.

Mr. ORDZHONIKIDZE (Russian Federation) said that the problem of poverty was complex and many-faceted; it therefore necessitated a multisectoral approach. His delegation welcomed the assistance provided by the United Nations development system in the implementation of national plans and programmes to eradicate poverty. He also welcomed the harmonization of efforts designed to incorporate tne gender perspective into poverty eradication programmes and endorsed effective oversight of the results of the coordinated programmes of the various functional commissions.

The lack of resources currently affecting development activities, coordination at country level and cooperation with the Bretton Woods institutions, the elimination of programme duplication and the harmonization of the work of the functional commissions were areas of particular interest and concern to his Government. Development funding should be continuous and predictable. The international community should mobilize additional financial resources adequate to the magnitude of the task. UNDP had a particularly valuable role to play in poverty alleviation programmes.

The international community could hasten the global process of democratic transformations by being more active in its support for countries with transitional economies. Greater attention by organizations in the United Nations system to the social problems of such countries and their integration into the world economy would be more in keeping with current realities. Russia supported continued efforts to galvanize the Economic and Social Council's activity, for example by strengthening its secretariat, thereby enabling the Council to coordinate the reaction of the United Nations system to the recommendations of international conferences and summits in a more effective manner.

Mr. WILMOT (Ghana) said that poverty eradication should be an essential element of all economic and social programmes of the United Nations system. His delegation noted that a number of measures had been put in place to

assist in the eradication of poverty, for example coordinated and integrated support for country-level action, the resident coordinator system, and the programmes of the functional commissions.

His delegation called for the strengthening of the resident coordinator system to enable it to better integrate the various forms of assistance offered at country level for the eradication of poverty. He also endorsed the observations concerning the need to: harmonize and coordinate the variety of mandates and activities of the United Nations system in the field of poverty eradication (para. 8), enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations system at the country level in pursuance of the Copenhagen Programme of Action, strengthen the role of country strategy notes, and implement pragmatic country-specific integrated approaches. The United Nations system should be an advocate for and answerable to the poor.

It was regrettable that despite the strong interest and effort of the United Nations system in poverty eradication, the level of financial resources continued to decline, making it difficult for multilateral development institutions to effectively confront the challenges of eradicating poverty. The targets and objectives on poverty eradication agreed at recent major international conferences could not be achieved unless adequate resource flows for the various programmes were provided on a predictable and assured basis. There was an urgent need to mobilize substantial new and additional resources.

His Government noted with satisfaction the serious consideration being given to the gender dimension in the effort to eradicate poverty. The United Nations system should include the Bretton Woods institutions in all efforts to promote an active policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all poverty eradication policies and programmes. He also wished to stress the importance of developing new strategies to prevent the inadvertent marginalization of women as distinct from mainstreaming the gender dimension.

Since the subject of poverty eradication cut across the priorities of recent major United Nations conferences, it was necessary to evolve a coherent set of policy guidelines for the United Nations system and the international community through a properly structured intergovernmental dialogue.

His delegation endorsed the proposals to coordinate the agendas and work programmes of the functional commissions and called for the systematic sharing of tasks among those commissions. In particular, Ghana was in favour of

maintaining a clear division of labour in which the General Assembly would address policy issues, the Economic and Social Council would oversee and coordinate the work of the functional commissions, and the commissions themselves would receive clear and specific mandates within well-defined areas of responsibility.

The Council was the primary intergovernmental forum for discussing poverty eradication from an integrated perspective. As such it should conduct regular in-depth reviews of various aspects of the subject of poverty eradication, culminating in an overall review of the theme in the year 2000 to coincide with the review of the goals of the World Summit for Social Development.

Ms. DOWDESWELL (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)) said that improved coordination for poverty eradication had acquired greater urgency in the context of declining resources. With poverty and the environment moving to the centre of the development agenda, the concept of development itself should be redefined, on the basis of self-generated growth and sustainability. At the same time, economic analysts should move away from the market-based approach, to take account of the constraints of natural and human capital, and the social and ecological externalities of traditional development policies.

UNEP believed that new development strategies should, inter alia, involve the poor in decision-making, ensure that commodity prices fully reflected production costs, support appropriate technologies, improve natural resource accounting, encourage community participation, recognize traditional land rights, encourage land reforms and strengthen the development work of international institutions.

In its own environmental work, UNEP had devised integrated programmes which sought to promote sustainable global production and consumption patterns in partnership with organizations and institutions at all levels. It had also helped to develop guidelines for sustainable use and management of freshwater and coastal resources, with its recommendations for equity based water management having been included in the Special Initiative on Africa. Focusing on the social aspects of drylands management, the Programme had sought to provide more effective assistance to the marginalized populations most seriously affected by desertification. Finally, it was working on sustainable development at the urban level, seeking to provide a framework for local involvement in protection of the ecosystem.

In developing and implementing those initiatives, and in incorporating gender considerations into its environmental policy guidelines, UNEP had worked on the basis of cooperation with the relevant United Nations agencies. Their constant aim was to contribute to the work of the United Nations by responding to the development challenges of the future.

Mr. N'DOW (Secretary-General of the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)) said that the concept of poverty eradication through partnership with all relevant groups had been given fresh impetus at the recent Habitat Conference. The Conference had shown that the issue of poverty eradication could not be divorced from that of shelter, and that partners at all levels, including women, non-governmental organizations, private sector and United Nations agencies, must work together to meet the challenges of the new urban world.

It had also demonstrated the wisdom of including partners from civil society in the discussion of environmental matters, both at the Conference itself and at the follow-up stage. The secretariat looked forward to receiving the support of the United Nations and of all its partners, so that the hopes raised at the Conference could be translated into action on shelter for the benefit of the global community.

Ms. HAGEN (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that ILO worked closely with international financial institutions and the United Nations system to promote poverty eradication through employment and appropriate economic and social policies. For that reason, the organization supported the statement by the Group of 77 and China at an earlier meeting concerning the need for better employment and growth-oriented economic policies as a complement to direct poverty alleviation programmes.

With regard to the Secretary-General's report (E/1996/61), she said that the recommendations in paragraphs 66 to 79 were an important beginning. Realizing that the United Nations system should concentrate on maximizing the quality of its assistance to Governments, ILO was concentrating on country-based employment reviews, both in its activities to follow up on the recent major United Nations conferences and in the inter-agency task force on employment and sustainable livelihoods. The task force hoped to develop innovative approaches to the problems of poverty and employment, while improving coordination of work between agencies in the field and headquarters.

In the light of the lessons learned at recent major conferences, the recommendations for improved cooperation on poverty should have referred to assistance for capacity-building and the participation of civil society in economic reform. Respect for human rights should also be considered a vital part of United Nations poverty eradication measures, while the gender perspective should be fully integrated into all programmes and activities. The report could also have given more attention to the work carried out by other parts of the United Nations system.

If everything went according to plan the task force on employment and sustained livelihoods would present a report on selected country reviews by the end of the first quarter of 1997. However, that time-frame did raise questions as to the feasibility of implementing the recommendation in paragraph 173 of the report, concerning the placing of productive employment and sustainable livelihoods on the agenda of the Commission for Social Development in 1997.

Convinced that full employment provided a foundation for the eradication of poverty, ILO remained committed to cooperate with all its partners to ensure the success of poverty eradication policies.

Mr. BAILLARGEON (Canada) said that the discussion of poverty was taking place in the midst of efforts to initiate broad reforms in the United Nations system. Poverty, as a multidimensional issue, was addressed in almost all United Nations programmes and activities; therefore, good coordination in that sector was key, since it would have a ripple effect throughout the system. For its part, Canada placed poverty firmly within the core of its foreign and development assistance policies. It believed that new ways were needed to address the socio-cultural, structural and historical factors that perpetuated poverty; that meant breaking down artificial divisions between social programme sectors and actively integrating the social and economic dimensions.

The first challenge for the international community was to work in partnership with developing countries to provide technical assistance in their efforts to elaborate poverty reduction strategies which corresponded to their specific situations. The second stage was to help provide basic social services and other forms of assistance to people living in poverty, through such structures as the 20/20 initiative. For its part, Canada already allocated 25 per cent of its bilateral official development assistance to meeting basic human needs.

The emphasis on programme approaches conceived, designed, managed and monitored under the leadership of recipient Governments was appropriate, but it was surprising that the report of the Secretary-General had downplayed the importance of UNDP round-table meetings and World Bank consultative group arrangements, which had an important role to play by including the broadest possible range of donors. Getting all the pertinent actors together with a recipient country was key to ensuring minimal overlap of effort and maximum resource mobilization.

Canada strongly supported the newly created inter-agency task forces on respectively, the enabling environment for social and economic development, employment and sustainable livelihoods and basic social services for all, but found their focus on indicators, monitoring progress and gathering best practices disappointing. It would support a stronger coordination role in support of country-level implementation mechanisms and intergovernmental machinery. In terms of financing, domestic savings and budgetary allocations, including reduced military spending, should be recognized as an important funding source for poverty strategies. His delegation had some reservations regarding the recommendations on securing predictable, continuous and assured funding. The hard-won consensus reached in the context of the negotiations on General Assembly resolution 50/227 should guide efforts in the poverty sector.

Only through deliberate and systematic attention to gender issues could programmes begin to address the issues of poverty. The role of the Commission on the Status of Women as a catalyst in promoting the integration of gender perspective in policies and programmes system-wide was especially important. A gender perspective should also be integrated in country strategy notes, given their importance to the orientation of United Nations activities in a particular country.

Canada agreed that the Council should assume the role as the primary intergovernmental forum for integrated treatment of poverty eradication. The Commission on Social Development should support the Council's function with special emphasis on national poverty eradication strategies and international actions to support them. The other commissions should focus on the linkages between poverty and their sectors of interest. Their work should culminate in a consideration of poverty by the Council in 1999, which would set the stage for the review of the implementation of Social Summit outcomes.

Turning to specific comments on the Secretary-General's report, first, the recommendations on country-level and intergovernmental coordination appeared to be artificially separated. Since most of the actual implementation would take place at the country level, an obvious way to provide linkages would be through the three task forces. With regard to the proposal that the Commission on Social Development should be the clearing-house for information from the other functional commissions, it was not clear whether that Commission was strong enough, as yet, to take on that ambitious function. Further efforts should be made to enhance the Commission, with a stronger policy coordination role reserved for the Council. The issue of harmonization of work programmes could remain on the Council's agenda for the time being. With regard to financing, the financing provisions of each of the global conferences were similar, and the potential for overlap was great. Therefore, the Council should have a role in that sector. The report suggested a role for the Statistical Commission in the elaboration of indicators and other statistical tools for measuring poverty. However, a collaborative effort under the auspices of the Administrative Committee on Coordination would take into account related initiatives and help to avoid overlap. Finally, the Council should not be overly prescriptive about the roles of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Commission on Human Settlements.

Mr. ABDELLAH (Tunisia) recalled that the eradication of poverty had been a priority goal of all the major United Nations conferences held since 1990. The breadth, complexity and multisectoral nature of that problem required the efforts of all members of society. By harmonizing work programmes on poverty eradication, the United Nations family would ensure the required coherence in policy at the field level needed to address the problem.

Tunisia welcomed the excellent coordination at the country level, whether through the resident coordinator, the country strategy note or local coordinating committees. All the various actors in the process - donors, non-governmental organizations and representatives of civil society, including the most disadvantaged groups - must cooperate in translating the broad objectives into a series of specific goals with firm time-frames.

In Tunisia, the Fund for National Solidarity had been established in 1992 to finance national projects for low-income groups and to assist in the development of basic community infrastructure. Localities eligible for such

projects were either poor, inaccessible or lacking basic facilities, such as drinking water supply, schools or electricity. The projects had greatly improved the standard of living of the target populations.

Although the international community was unanimous in stating that poverty eradication was a priority for the 1990s, contributions to multilateral development institutions had continued to decline. If that trend continued, all efforts would be doomed to failure. The experience of many countries over the past two decades had amply demonstrated that social progress was much more than a simple play of market forces. The priority objectives of ensuring the social protection of the individual and his integration into society would not be achieved without the political will to make an investment at the national level, but also internationally, in the welfare of all.

Ms. DURRANT (Jamaica), while acknowledging the primary responsibility of Governments for defining and implementing poverty eradication strategies, said that the United Nations role was also critical. The United Nations system must continue to provide policy advice in the broadest sense, enhanced data and information bases and support at the national level, development and provision of basic social services and other concrete initiatives which would directly affect the poor. The inter-agency task forces were an appropriate response to the global conferences, and had already accomplished much towards the implementation of conference goals.

While her delegation supported the recommendations for a substantial increase in funding, it was concerned at the implications of the proposal that consideration should be given to setting aside a certain proportion of resources for joint poverty eradication initiatives out of existing allocations for multilateral institutions, rather than finding new and additional resources for poverty eradication. Since national and international environment merited equal attention, the area covered by the task force on the enabling environment should be broadened to include trade liberalization, investment and private capital flows and transfer of technology.

With regard to the gender dimension of poverty, greater coherence was needed in information collection, research and analysis, as well as the production of gender-disaggregated data for use in setting policies for addressing the feminization of poverty. Her delegation supported the recommendation contained in paragraph 98 of the Secretary-General's report.

Harmonization and coordination, particularly at the country level, were critical to the successful implementation of poverty eradication strategies. While it was desirable for the eradication of poverty to remain a cross-cutting priority, a coherent set of policy guidelines to avoid overlap and duplication were essential. More attention could have been paid in the report to the role of civil society in programme development. Non-governmental organizations and community groups, which where often closest to the stark reality of poverty, must be partners in the process. Finally, there appeared to be no systematic sharing of tasks among the functional commissions, and a clearer division of labour was needed.

Mr. HOLTHE (Observer for Norway) said that the 1990s had produced a growing global consensus that human beings must be at the centre of development efforts. There was therefore need for a significant increase in the resources allocated to basic social services and for the utilization of those resources in a more effective and focused way. The tools which had been developed to improve coordination of United Nations poverty eradication activities at the field level, including the resident coordinator system, the country strategy note, field-level committees, thematic working groups, the programme approach and round-table meetings and consultative group arrangements, should be fully implemented.

In that connection, the United Nations System-Wide Special Initiative on Africa, which emphasized the need for better coordination between the Bretton Woods institutions, United Nations agencies and bilateral donors in order to reinforce the overall effect of development assistance, was a new and positive development. While the extent to which new and additional resources could be mobilized was still unclear, if implemented the Special Initiative would greatly improve the quality of utilization of overall resources. It would be useful, however, to clarify a number of points regarding the implementation of the Special Initiative, including the degree of cooperation with African authorities, the use of existing mechanisms, financial issues, and the degree of affiliation with the various United Nations agencies.

Together with the Government of the Netherlands, Norway had convened an international meeting in Oslo the previous April to contribute to the formulation of a global strategy for poverty eradication, in keeping with the concrete strategy and partnership called for by the Group of Seven.

Norway fully supported the Secretary-General's call for practical steps to mainstream the gender perspective into all poverty eradication activities and welcomed the establishment of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women to address the cross-cutting nature of gender issues. It was important to have an integrated follow-up of the global conferences so that cross-cutting issues such as gender and poverty eradication could be effectively addressed. Investing in women and children was the most effective way of dealing with poverty eradication. Indeed, poverty eradication programmes which did not fully integrate the gender perspective would fail to achieve their objectives.

He drew attention to the paradox between the wide recognition that poverty eradication was a priority concern and the recent trend towards declining multilateral development assistance. Adequate and predictable resource flows were essential if poverty eradication was to become a realistic goal in the foreseeable future. A reformed and thus strengthened United Nations system could contribute significantly to that end.

Mr. WEIBGEN (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)) said that poverty and food insecurity would be the biggest single challenge for developing countries in the twenty-first century and strategies to address that challenge must target the rural areas of those countries, where most of the world's 1.3 billion poor lived.

A cruel irony of poverty was that while most poor people lived and worked in rural areas where food should be produced, they lacked adequate land and water resources to produce enough food for their families; they also lacked employment opportunities and so could not generate enough cash income to purchase food. Improved technologies to increase production and productivity were often not available to the poor because of their high cost.

In their struggle for survival, the rural poor often resorted to practices that were harmful to the environment, thereby further jeopardizing both their own food security and that of future generations. Land shortages drove rural people to cultivate steep slopes or land that was more suitable for pastures or forests. Such practices led to reduced production and were major factors in dry land degradation resulting in desertification, especially in Africa.

Rural poverty was also inextricably linked to urban poverty since the rural poor tended to migrate to urban areas. Most developing countries were unable to cope with such migration and the resulting social dislocation, political

instability and crime. It was therefore important that scarce resources should be targeted to the root causes rather than the consequences of urban poverty.

In response to that challenge, FAO had been undertaking vigorous policy advisory and technical assistance programmes, often in close collaboration with other United Nations agencies, in support of the efforts of member States to increase food production and create rural employment, particularly in low-income, food-deficit countries. In November 1996, for example, it would convene the World Food Summit in Rome to underscore the need for low-income, food-deficit countries to consider food security and agricultural development as the first step towards the achievement of economic growth, political stability and poverty reduction.

Preparation for the World Food Summit had provided many opportunities for collaboration and coordination within the United Nations system. In addition, FAO collaborated closely with United Nations agencies, such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Bank and UNEP, in implementing the International Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought. It also participated in the inter-agency task forces set up to coordinate the follow-up to the current series of global conferences.

Mr. ELMIGER (Observer for Switzerland) said that his Government welcomed the efforts being made to strengthen coordination between the United Nations and other multilateral, governmental and non-governmental bodies and to establish strategic priorities for poverty eradication programmes. Certain aspects of poverty were particularly disturbing, notably the feminization of the phenomenon, which was linked to socio-cultural legacies and to the structural adjustment of economies. Female poverty adversely affected the development of the family and society, gave rise to the evil of child labour, and created imbalances in the labour market. Switzerland therefore supported all the measures that had been proposed at the national and international levels to integrate the gender equality dimension into poverty eradication programmes in order to permit women to participate in decision-making in all areas of concern to them.

Economic and social development were two sides of the same coin and it was impossible in the current constantly evolving economic and social environment to pursue an effective poverty eradication policy at either the national or international level which did not take into account the various dimensions of

human development. The international community should therefore establish social, technical and economic poverty assessment criteria in order to ensure that multilateral assistance was more effectively targeted. In that regard, country strategy notes were an effective instrument for disseminating data on poverty to all concerned actors within the United Nations system and helping design programmes geared to the specific needs of individual countries.

With regard to the division of labour among the various actors concerned with poverty eradication, all members of United Nations specialized agencies should be able to participate fully in the work of the functional commissions, which should each have a clearly defined area of competence and a detailed programme of work. Switzerland supported the proposals made and the decisions taken in that regard.

Finally, in order to eradicate poverty, it was absolutely essential to create the conditions for job-creating economic growth. In that connection, the positive effects of the opening up of markets and liberalization of trade could be achieved only by strengthening multilateral dialogue, particularly between the specialized agencies of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions. Furthermore, global efforts to eradicate poverty could succeed only if the social dimension of the liberalization of international trade were taken fully into account.

Mr. MWAKAWAGO (United Republic of Tanzania), recalling the commitment made by Governments at the World Summit for Social Development, to formulate national poverty eradication policies and strategies in partnership with civil society, said that his Government had adopted various economic, social and political measures aimed at eradicating poverty. In collaboration with the World Bank, it was preparing a country memorandum on poverty alleviation to analyse the socio-economic situation and suggest policy measures designed to achieve sustained economic growth. A Poverty Eradication Division had also been established to coordinate the efforts of the different actors involved in poverty eradication in the country. In addition, the Government was formulating a national policy on poverty eradication, which would be ready for implementation by the end of 1996.

For those measures to be effective, however, massive resources, both national and international, must be mobilized. The international community was called upon to provide a substantial and predictable flow of grant money and

soft loans. In particular, donor countries, development agencies and multilateral banks must review their grant and lending programmes with a view to increasing the share of resources devoted to human development. He appealed to other countries to emulate the example of the Nordic States and the Netherlands, which had fulfilled the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance.

Poverty eradication measures, however, could not be effective without the involvement of women. He was proud to say that Tanzanian women occupied key positions in both the public and private sectors and participated in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes at all levels. While they had not achieved optimum development, they were moving in the right direction.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.